

ZYGOTE

This month sees Zygote storing religious imagery on his phone to protect him from evil – while cackling over the confessions of his fellow evil-doers. You've got to sin to be saved, so they say

BLAIR WHICH

Does anyone remember Tony Blair? He used to be the Prime Minister of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It seems he is not only a forgotten leader, but even his identity is not worth stealing.

Zygote has tracked down 17 websites containing the poor man's name, and can confirm that every one of them has been hijacked. What must be disheartening for Blair is that none of them is attracting traffic, not even the one that proclaims: "As well as running a country, Tony Blair has also coordinated numerous children's parties, including the use of a mobile disco, making him the ideal celebrity to appear at your event." Worse still, there are no fewer than five top-level internet domain names still available. Clearly, even the hijackers don't consider the Blair name worth the few quid it costs to register.

Saddest of all, Blair has not seen fit to buy the available domain names himself. Zygote was actually tempted to buy tonyblair.uk.com and tonyblair.eu.com, but on reflection it seems the man's future is undoubtedly behind him.

BLACK POWER

Part III of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act has now come into effect. This requires individuals and businesses to hand over their encryption keys to any public authority on demand. The

alleged purpose of the legislation is to thwart terrorists and criminals. The scope of the Home Office guidelines is mind-boggling. Encryption keys don't have to be complex chunks of code – they can include something as simple as your list of personal passwords.

Failure to comply when served with a notice is now a criminal offence carrying up to five years' imprisonment. The Home Office website states that even emails sent from handheld devices, such as a BlackBerry, can be included in the legislation. But Zygote notes that messages sent via a BlackBerry are encrypted when in transit and decrypted once they get through the recipient's firewall. This means a public authority can demand the passwords of the receiver as well as the sender, so any one of us can unwittingly become subject to this dreadful new law.

Fortunately, the new legislation covers only data stored in the UK, so encrypted content that merely passes through the UK and is never copied or stored here will not be caught – which means we can either rebel or emigrate.

PROTECTION RACKET

Going to holy confession used to be a miserable affair, with little scope for public entertainment. Fortunately, that's all changed thanks to the internet, where a holy host of confessional sites can now be found.

Zygote's favourite is www.dailyconfession.com, which invites you to join its social network of sinners and confess everything in sordid detail. The website is split into different zones, and each zone is dedicated to one of the Ten Commandments and Seven Deadly Sins. Coveting thy neighbour's wife gets the most hits, although Thou Shalt Not Kill is doing well. Zygote confesses he was too idle to look at the Sloth zone and too prudish to delve into Lust.

But another website offers salvation from this den of iniquity. "You no longer have to carry holy cards with you," according to the homepage at www.santiprotettori.com. It continues: "Download holy images to protect you, for \$1.99." Yes, for the equivalent of a quid a time, you can download the Virgin Mary, a selection of blessed saints, Jesus and Pope Ratzinger himself to your mobile phone screen, so that their holy image can "protect you". The service is based in Italy, where they know a thing or two about protection in exchange for money.

Zygote is aware of at least one gentleman who could have benefited from divine intervention when it comes to mobile phones. Please read on.

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS

When 22-year-old Piotr Staniaszek renewed his \$147-a-month (around £75) communications contract with Bell Mobility of

Canada, he received a nice new Motorola mobile and an "unlimited mobile browser plan". Then he got a bit bored at work, hooked his phone up to the office PC, and started downloading high-definition movies from the web. What he failed to do was read the bit in his contract that set out the charge-per-kilobyte for using his phone as a modem. When the first monthly bill arrived in time for Christmas, he thought the \$59,000 (around £30,000) charge was a mistake. He was right.

Bell Mobility recalculated, and checked the number of kilobytes again. The amended charge was \$85,000 (around £43,000). Luckily, it was the season of goodwill, and Bell switched Mr Staniaszek's rate to the best data plan available. This reduced the money he owed to a mere \$3,243 (around £1,656).

There are three lessons to be learned here. Always read the small print, don't watch movies at work, and never underestimate the Canadian sense of humour.

HAPPY TRANNYVERSARY

Zygote has just joined in the 60th birthday celebrations of the transistor, the building block of every electronic circuit in the world, including those in all our computers.

The device did not find commercial success for the first eight years of its existence, until the world succumbed to the delights of the original transistor radio. Its individual transistors were welded to resistors and capacitors by dextrous blacksmiths, the machine fitted in your pocket, it emitted horrible music through a tinny little speaker, and it cost about £200 in today's money. Sixty years on, we have the iPod.

In the words of that wisecracking comedian Karl Marx, "History repeats, first as tragedy, then as farce." **CS**

Great Moments in Computing
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242: ONLINE ORDERING



Basic mail-order commands were introduced to the business community in April 1739



Then, in the Machine Age, mail-order protocols went online



Today the same system has been adopted by the online market leader.